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**HEALTH OFFICIALS URGE PARENTS TO CHECK THEIR CHILDREN'S TEST
RESULTS FOR SICKLE CELL DISEASE**

September is Sick Cell Disease Awareness Month in Virginia

(RICHMOND, Va.)—Many of the 115,000 Virginians who carry the trait for sickle cell disease don't realize that their child could inherit the painful blood disorder. In observance of Sick Cell Awareness Month, the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) urges all parents to find out if their child has the sickle cell gene, also called the sickle cell trait, especially if they are prone to carrying the disease.

"All newborns in Virginia are screened for sickle cell disease and parents should be sure to ask their doctor for the test results," said Jene Radcliffe-Shipman, manager of the VDH Sick Cell Awareness Program.

When both parents carry one sickle cell gene, the odds are one in four with each pregnancy that their baby will inherit sickle cell disease. Early diagnosis is critical. Through early detection, education and the use of penicillin, life-threatening complications may be reduced.

In Virginia an average of 75 newborns are identified with sickle cell disease each year through the VDH Newborn Screening Program. Last year, about 8,000 adults were tested at Virginia health departments. More than 3,000 Virginians live with the blood disorder.

Sickle cell disease is the most prevalent genetic disease identified among blacks. One in 12 carries the gene for sickle cell, and one in 350 has the disease.

Hispanics from South and Central America are the second-largest group in the United States identified with sickle cell disease. The National Heart, Blood and Lung Institute estimates that one in 1,100 to 1,400 Hispanic newborns in the United States are born with the disease each year. The gene for the disease is also found in Caucasians of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern descent.

Sickle cell disease is an inherited disorder that causes red blood cells to change from their usual round, smooth shape to a sickle-like shape. These sickle cells stick together and block the flow of blood and oxygen, causing pain, anemia, infections and organ damage.

To learn more about sickle cell disease, contact your local health department for a copy of "Sickle Cell Awareness: At the Heart of Decision Making," available in English and Spanish. Additional information is also available on the Virginia Department of Health's Web site at www.vahealth.org/sicklecell/.

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